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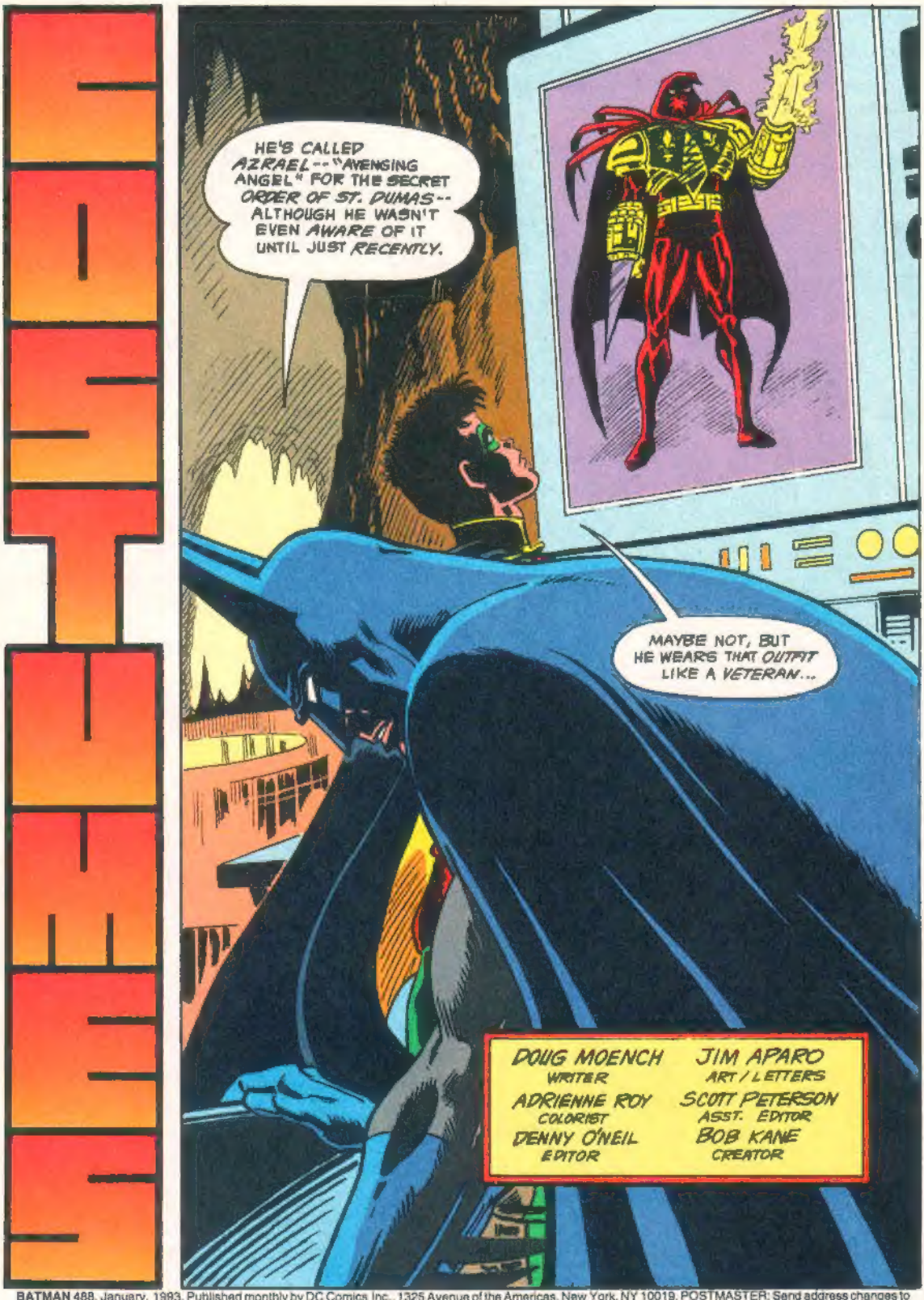
HE'S CALLED AZRAEL--"AVENGING ANGEL" FOR THE SECRET ORDER OF ST. DUMAS--ALTHOUGH HE WASN'T EVEN AWARE OF IT UNTIL JUST RECENTLY.
MAYBE NOT, BUT HE WEARS THAT OUTFIT LIKE A VETERAN...
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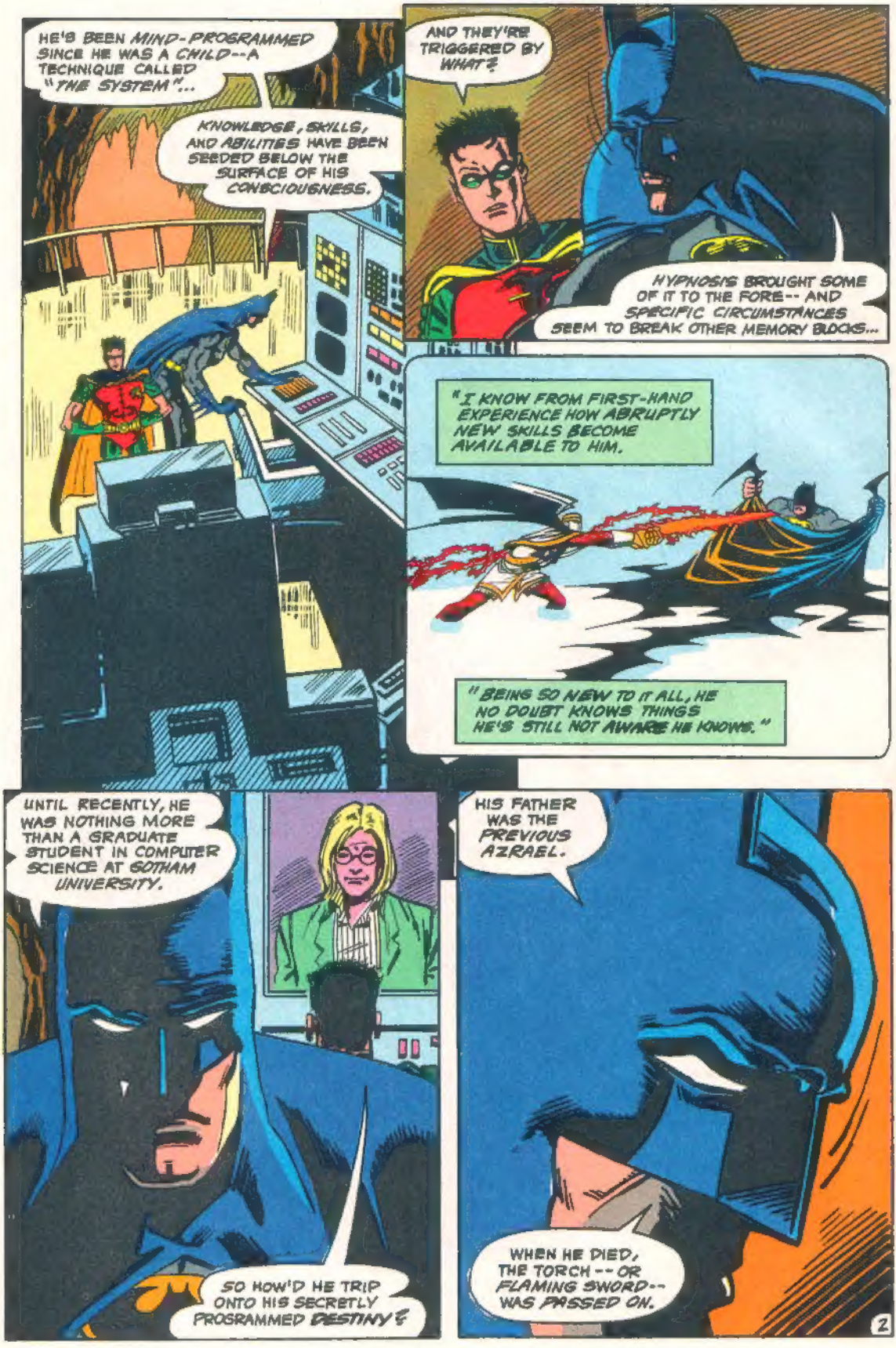
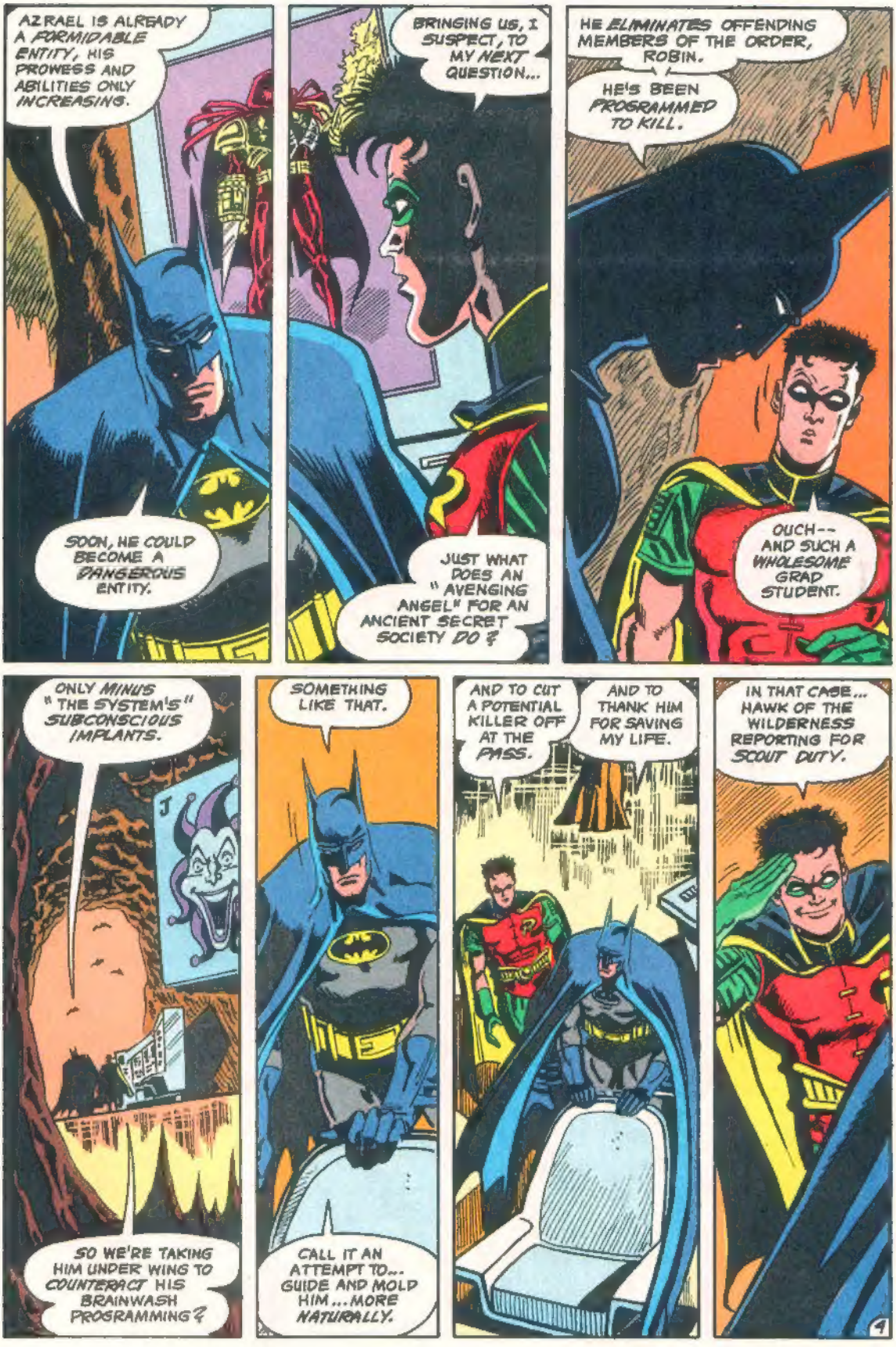
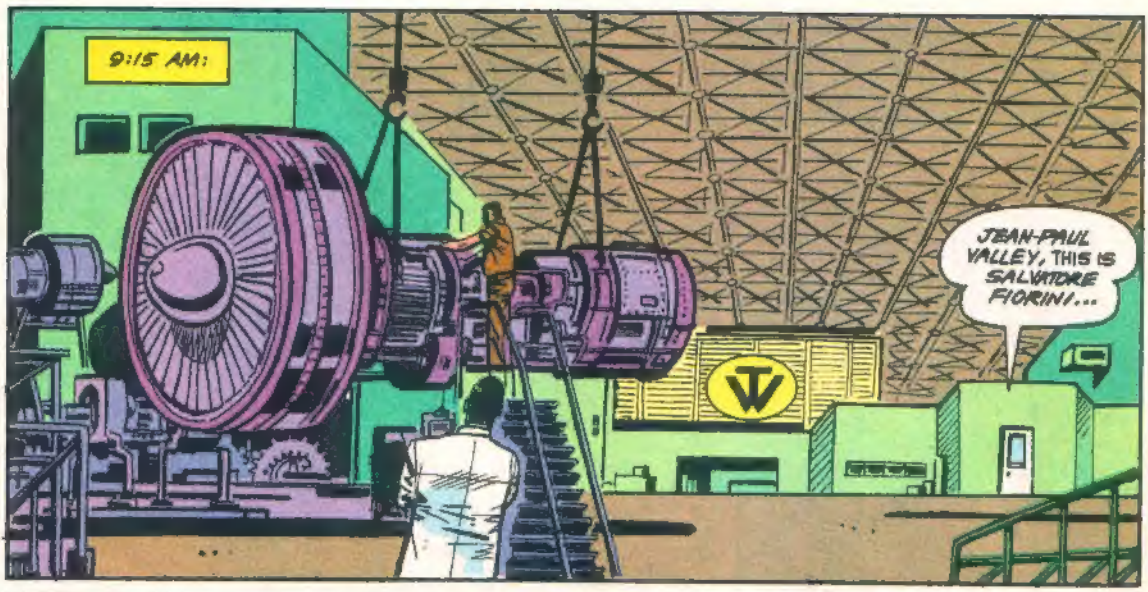

HE'S BEEN MIND-PROGRAMMED SINCE HE WAS A CHILD--A TECHNIQUE CALLED "THE SYSTEM"...
KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES HAVE BEEN SEEDED BELOW THE SURFACE OF HIS CONSCIOUSNESS.
AND THEY'RE TRIGGERED BY WHAT?
HYPNOSIS BROUGHT SOME OF IT TO THE FORE-- AND SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES SEEM TO BREAK OTHER MEMORY BLOCKS...
"I KNOW FROM FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE HOW ABRUPTLY NEW SKILLS BECOME AVAILABLE TO HIM.
"BEING SO NEW TO IT ALL, HE NO DOUBT KNOWS THINGS HE'S STILL NOT AWARE HE KNOWS."
UNTIL RECENTLY, HE WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A GRADUATE STUDENT IN COMPUTER SCIENCE AT GOTHAM UNIVERSITY.
SO HOW'D HE TRIP ONTO HIS SECRETLY PROGRAMMED DESTINY?
HIS FATHER WAS THE PREVIOUS AZRAEL.
WHEN HE DIED, THE TORCH -- OR FLAMING SWORD-- WAS PASSED ON.
2

AT FIRST, THE SON COULDN'T BELIEVE THAT HE'D BEEN FULLY TRAINED AND PREPARED FOR THIS OTHER IDENTITY, BUT--
DEET DEET
LUCIUS? THANKS FOR RETURNING MY CALL.
I'M SENDING A YOUNG MAN OVER--HIS NAME IS JEAN-PAUL VALLEY...
I WANT YOU TO GIVE HIM A JOB IN THE WAYNECORP SECURITY FORCE.
RIGHT, BRUCE-- AFTER THE RECENT SECURITY BREACHES IN TECH DIVISION, ANOTHER MAN CAN'T HURT.
I'LL HAVE SAL FIORINI SHOW HIM THE ROPES.
THANKS, LUCIUS-- EXPECT HIM TOMORROW MORNING AT NINE.
SO WHEN HE'S NOT BEING AZRAEL, THE GRAD STUDENT'S NAME IS JEAN-PAUL VALLEY.
KLIK
YES--AND I WANT YOU TO SHOW HIM THE REAL ROPES, ROBIN...
TOMORROW NIGHT.
SURE... BUT EVEN WITH THE RECENT INDUSTRIAL ESPIONAGE, I ASSUME OUR MOTIVES GO BEYOND BEEFING UP WAYNETECH'S SECURITY?
FAR BEYOND THAT...
3


AZRAEL IS ALREADY A FORMIDABLE ENTITY, HIS PROWESS AND ABILITIES ONLY INCREASING.
SOON, HE COULD BECOME A DANGEROUS ENTITY.
BRINGING US, I SUSPECT, TO MY NEXT QUESTION...
JUST WHAT DOES AN "AVENGING ANGEL" FOR AN ANCIENT SECRET SOCIETY DO?
HE ELIMINATES OFFENDING MEMBERS OF THE ORDER, ROBIN.
HE'S BEEN PROGRAMMED TO KILL.
OUCH-- AND SUCH A WHOLESOME GRAD STUDENT.
ONLY MINUS "THE SYSTEM'S" SUBCONSCIOUS IMPLANTS.
SO WE'RE TAKING HIM UNDER WING TO COUNTERACT HIS BRAINWASH PROGRAMMING?
SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
CALL IT AN ATTEMPT TO... GUIDE AND MOLD HIM... MORE NATURALLY.
AND TO CUT A POTENTIAL KILLER OFF AT THE PASS.
AND TO THANK HIM FOR SAVING MY LIFE.
IN THAT CASE... HAWK OF THE WILDERNESS REPORTING FOR SCOUT DUTY.
4

AND WHILE I'M PLAYING ANGEL'S GUARDIAN, YOU'LL BE BUSY ON SOMETHING ELSE?
I'LL BE... RESTING.
YOU ALL RIGHT?
JUST... TIRED.
ALL RIGHT-- I'LL GO FIND HAROLD AND START PREPARING NOW.
HE CLIMBS TOWARD NINE SPARKS GLITTERING IN DARKNESS, FASCINATED BY THE PURPLE ONE...
IT LOOMS CLOSER, SPINNING OUT INTO A SPIRAL, AN EVER-WIDENING GYRE...
...FINALLY SHOOTING OFF OUT OF SIGHT...
...AS THE OTHER EIGHT SPARKS FADE TO BLACK.
5

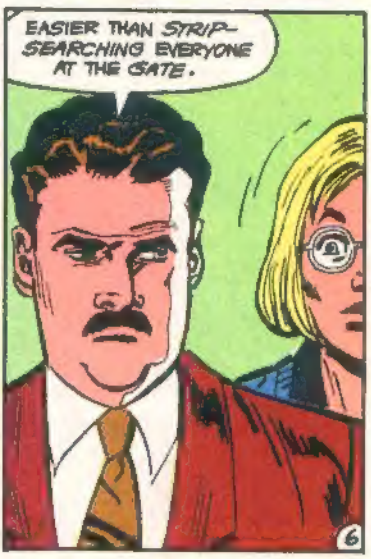

9:15 AM:
JEAN-PAUL VALLEY, THIS IS SALVATORE FIORINI...

SAL IS OUR HEAD OF SECURITY-- AND HE'LL GET YOU STARTED.
WELCOME ABOARD, JEAN-PAUL.
PLEASED TO MEET YOU, SIR.

WELL, I'D BETTER DROP YOUR FILE OFF AT PERSONNEL...
ANY QUESTIONS, GIVE ME A CALL.
YES SIR, MR. FOX--AND THANKS AGAIN.
VALLEY, J.

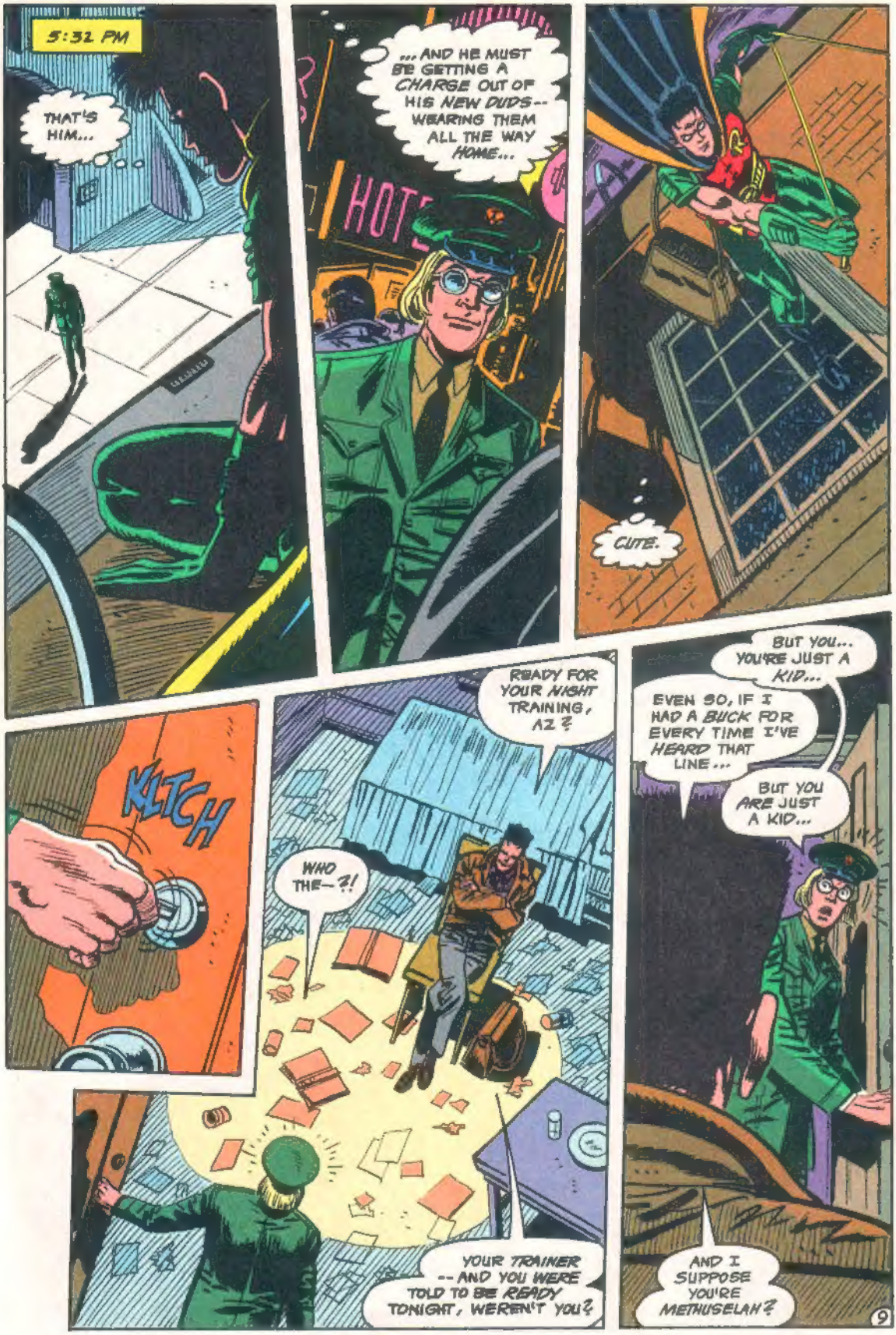
HERE YOU GO--ONCE I SHOW YOU THE LOCKER ROOM, YOU CAN CHANGE AND MAKE IT OFFICIAL.
THANK YOU, SIR.
THE NAME'S SAL.

YOU'LL START OUT MONITORING THE PHOTOCOPY MACHINES--BORING DUTY, BUT YOU'LL GRADUATE TO MORE THRILLING STUFF.
YOU MAINTAIN SECURITY ON THE XEROXES?

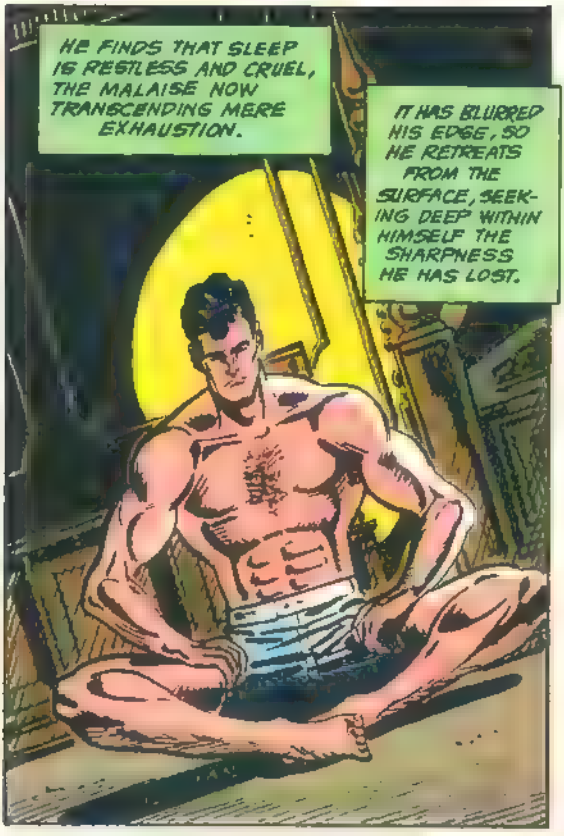

EASIER THAN STRIP-SEARCHING EVERYONE AT THE GATE.
6

TWO MONTHS AGO, OF COURSE, WE DIDN'T DO EITHER--BUT THEN WE WERE BEATEN TO MARKET BY A QUICKIE KNOCK-OFF OF A NEW LASER MICROPHONE--
--MADE FROM OUR R AND D DESIGNS.
THEN "INDUSTRIAL ESPIONAGE" IS REAL.
'CASE YOU HAVEN'T HEARD, KID, RUSSIA COLLAPSED --AND TURF WARS ARE PRETTY MUCH OVER.
LOCKER ROOM
THESE DAYS, SPIES GO AFTER IDEAS--PRODUCT DESIGNS, NEW INNOVATIONS, ANYTHING IMPORTANT IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY.
UNIFORM'S A GOOD FIT--AND HERE'S YOUR STATION.
THE MACHINES WON'T WORK WITHOUT THIS KEY, AND BEFORE TURNING IT, YOU CHECK THE MATERIAL TO BE COPIED AND THE ACCOMPANYING SLIP. FOR INSTANCE...
'MORNING, TONY--WHATCHA GOT?
ENGINE PLANS, SAL--THREE COPIES.
ENGINE X-4373
DO NOT COPY
COPY AUTHORIZATION
DOCUMENT X-4373
NO. OF COPIES 3
SEE, WHEN THE MATERIAL'S MARKED "DO NOT COPY" LIKE THIS, IT DOESN'T GET COPIED WITHOUT THIS SIGNED AUTHORIZATION--AND WHEN THE SLIP SAYS THREE COPIES, THAT DOES NOT MEAN FOUR OR FIVE.
AND MAKE SURE THAT ANY SPOILED COPIES ARE IMMEDIATELY SHREDDED.
GOT IT.
GOT IT?
OKAY, TONY--JEAN-PAUL HERE WILL TURN THE KEY SO YOU CAN COPY YOUR STUFF.
7

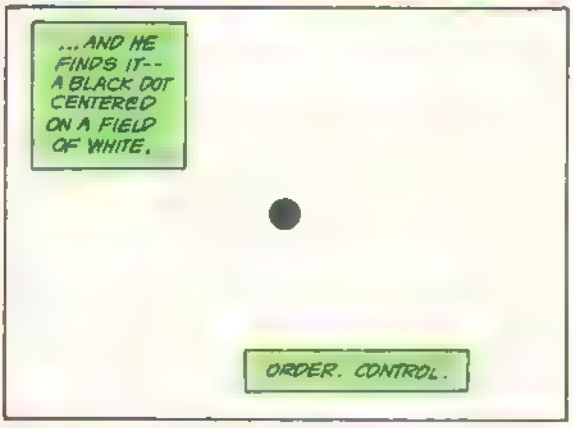
WHAT ON EARTH--
JUST... ME, ALFRED...
FLANG
KEESH
TEESH
KUSH
GOOD LORD, SIR! YOU NEARLY FRIGHTENED ME HALF TO--
SORRY, ALFRED... BUT DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE BREAKFAST TRAY...
TOO TIRED TO EAT ANYWAY.

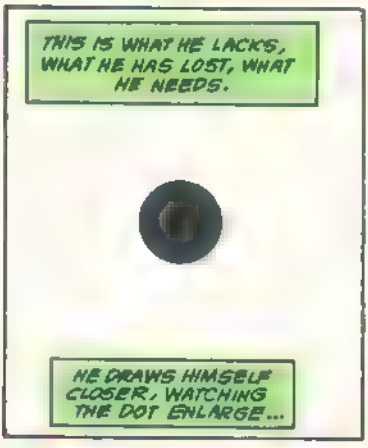

5:32 PM
THAT'S HIM...
...AND HE MUST BE GETTING A CHARGE OUT OF HIS NEW DUDS-- WEARING THEM ALL THE WAY HOME...
CUTE.
KLTCH
READY FOR YOUR NIGHT TRAINING, AZ?
WHO THE--?!
YOUR TRAINER -- AND YOU WERE TOLD TO BE READY TONIGHT, WEREN'T YOU?
BUT YOU... YOU'RE JUST A KID...
EVEN SO, IF I HAD A BUCK FOR EVERY TIME I'VE HEARD THAT LINE...
BUT YOU ARE JUST A KID...
AND I SUPPOSE YOU'RE METHUSELAH?
9

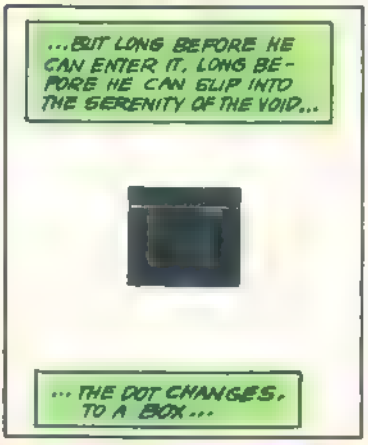
I KNOW I'M NOT EXPERIENCED... WHICH IS WHY I EXPECTED THE BATMAN TO BE THE ONE WHO--
YOU WANT THE MANTLE OF THE BAT, MAN, YOU GOTTA EARN IT-- AND BELIEVE ME, I OUGHTTA KNOW.
IN THE MEANTIME...
...I'LL JUST HAVE TO DO.
R
YOU... YOU'RE ROBIN?
YEAH, I KNOW-- THE LEGEND LOOMS A LOT LARGER THAN MY SHOE SIZE.
BUT I THINK I'VE CORRECTLY GUESSED YOUR SIZE.
CHUF
WHAT IS THIS?
YOUR TRAINING OUTFIT.
MY TRAINING OUT--
PUT IT ON, AZ-- AND WE'LL TALK.
10

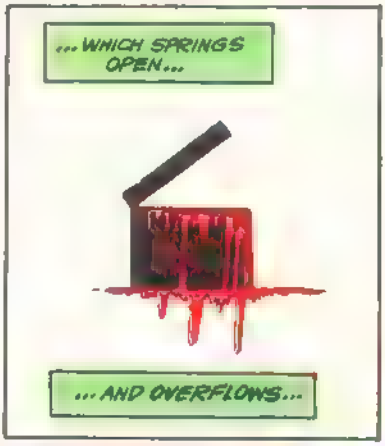

HE FINDS THAT SLEEP IS RESTLESS AND CRUEL, THE MALAISE NOW TRANSCENDING MERE EXHAUSTION.
IT HAS BLURRED HIS EDGE, SO HE RETREATS FROM THE SURFACE, SEEKING DEEP WITHIN HIMSELF THE SHARPNESS HE HAS LOST.

HE SEARCHES HIS MIND AND SOUL FOR THE ANTIDOTE TO NINE GLITTERING SPARKS...

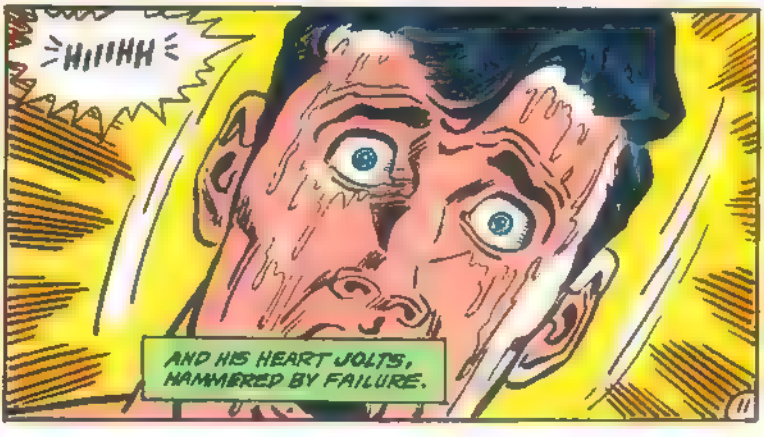

...AND HE FINDS IT-- A BLACK DOT CENTERED ON A FIELD OF WHITE.
ORDER. CONTROL.


THIS IS WHAT HE LACKS, WHAT HE HAS LOST, WHAT HE NEEDS.
HE DRAWS HIMSELF CLOSER, WATCHING THE DOT ENLARGE...


...BUT LONG BEFORE HE CAN ENTER IT, LONG BEFORE HE CAN SLIP INTO THE SERENITY OF THE VOID...
... THE DOT CHANGES, TO A BOX...


...WHICH SPRINGS OPEN...
... AND OVERFLOWS...

...UNTIL THE WHITE FIELD IS AWASH IN BLOOD.

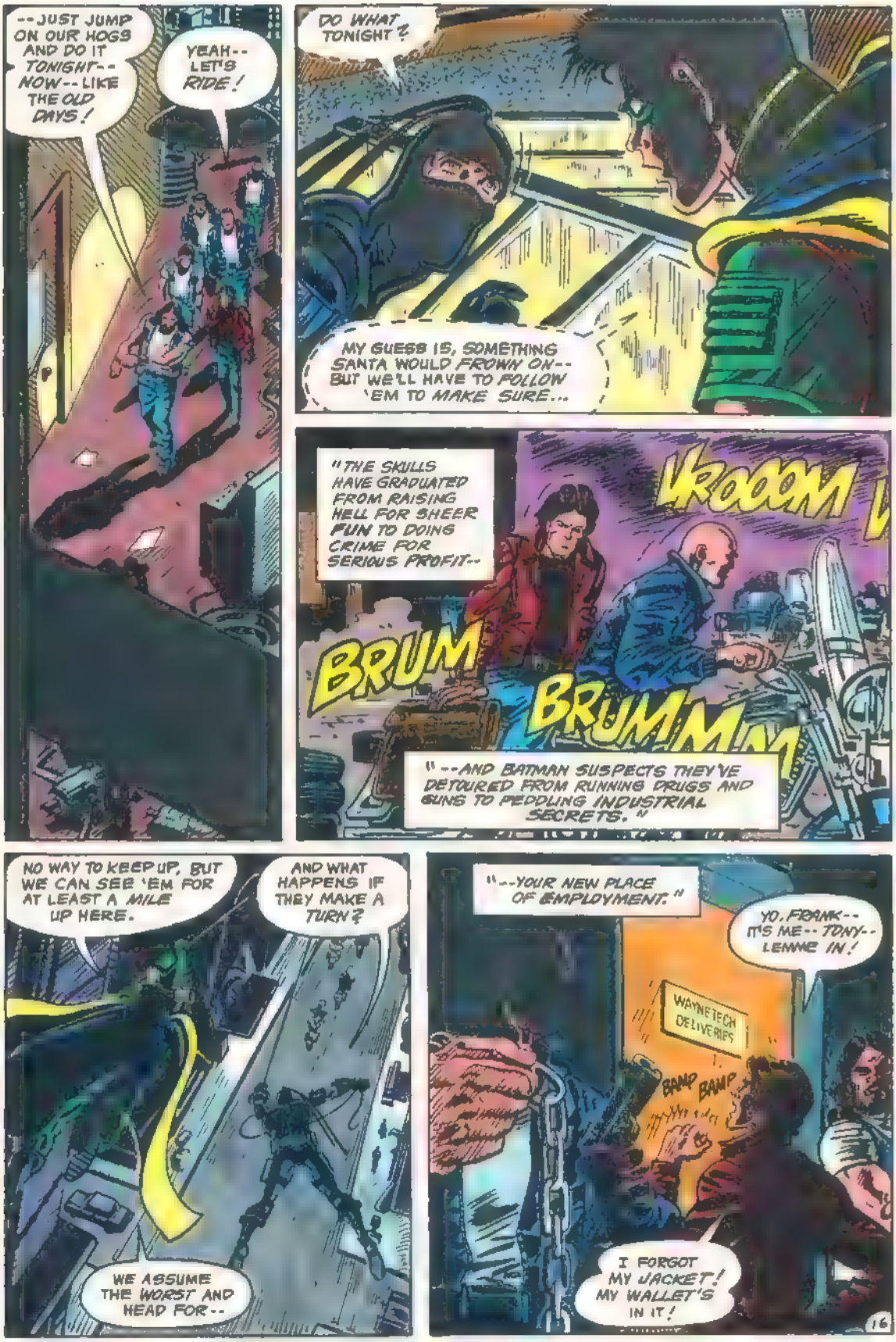

HHHHH
AND HIS HEART JOLTS, HAMMERED BY FAILURE.

WELL... IT FITS.
LIKE MIDNIGHT OVER GOTHAM. NOT AS SPIFFY AS YOUR AZRAEL DUDS, MAYBE, BUT A LOT BETTER THAN THAT SECURITY GUARD UNIFORM--AND I'M KINDA PROUD OF IT.
YOU--?
YEAH, IT INCORPORATES A NUMBER OF MY COSTUME'S FEATURES...
FIFTEEN-LAYER KEVLAR SHEATHED IN FIRE-RESISTANT NOMEX-FOUR FABRIC...
UTILITY PODS FOR TRACKING DEVICE, RADIO SCANNER, POISON ANTIDOTES, FOOD CONCENTRATES...
THREE-MINUTE AIR SUPPLY, FINGERPRINT POWDER, MINI-TELESCOPE, SMOKE PELLETS, FLOTATION PODS, AND SO ON.
FINALLY, SOMETHING NEW-- AUTO-RETRACTABLE GRAPNEL AND LINE, TRIGGERED BY A BUTTON CONCEALED IN THE PALM OF THE GLOVE.
JUST AIM YOUR ARM AND SQUEEZE YOUR FIST.
12

NOW-- ANY OTHER QUESTIONS BEFORE WE CRASH THE NIGHT?
YEAH -- HOW DID YOU GET IN MY APARTMENT?
YOUR FIRST LESSON...
LOCKPICKING ONE-ON-ONE.
LAW ORDER KRGL MAYOR
ANY LOCK CAN BE OPENED LIKE THAT?
ANY LOW-TECH LOCK-- GIVEN A WIDE ENOUGH ASSORTMENT OF PICKS... AND PLENTY OF PATIENCE.
OTHER THAN HONING OUR LINE-CLIMBING TECHNIQUE, WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?
SECOND LESSON-- ROOFTOP SURVEILLANCE.
ON WHOM?
BATMAN SUGGESTED TONY CHEKKO FOR PRACTICE.
TONY? I MET HIM THIS MORNING -- MAKING COPIES-- BUT WHY HIM... UNLESS BATMAN HAS SOME REASON TO SUSPECT--
LET'S JUST SAY THERE'S NO REASON PRACTICE CAN'T BE PRODUCTIVE.
AND WE GOT HERE JUST IN TIME -- TONY'S LEAVING...

HE'S GOING BY FOOT, SO WE CAN FOLLOW BY ROOFTOP-- ALTHOUGH THIS FIRST SWING IS A HEFTY ONE...
CHAKT
SHAK
THINK YOU CAN HANDLE IT?
SOON...
SOTTS GARAGE
ASK A STUPID QUESTION...
BATMAN WAS RIGHT... OUR FRIEND TONY IS HOOKED UP WITH THE SKULLS...
WHO?
BIKER GANG.
14

--DID OKAY WITH THOSE LASER MIKE PLANS, TONY, BUT THAT WAS NOTHIN' COMPARED TO THIS!
EASY, O.G.-- NO NEED TO PLAY ORIGINAL GANGSTER WITH ME, MAN.
LISTEN! THAT JET ENGINE DESIGN IS CUTTING EDGE RIGHT NOW, BUT IF WE DON'T GET IT SOON-- IN ENOUGH TIME FOR OUR CLIENT TO BEAT WAYNE TECH TO MARKET--
--IT'LL BE OLD NEWS, TONY-- WORTHLESS!
I KNOW-- BUT I ALREADY TOLD YOU THERE'S NO WAY TO SMUGGLE THE ORIGINALS OUT...
... AN' NOW THEY'VE EVEN GOT A FRIGGIN' GUARD ON THE COPY MACHINES.
WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO ON THE ROOF?
EITHER FIND A SKYLIGHT OR CLIMB BACK DOWN THE OTHER SIDE.
HEY, NINETY PERCENT OF THIS GIG IS WINGING IT.
I SUPPOSE THAT'S ANOTHER TRADE SECRET?
THE ULTIMATE ONE.

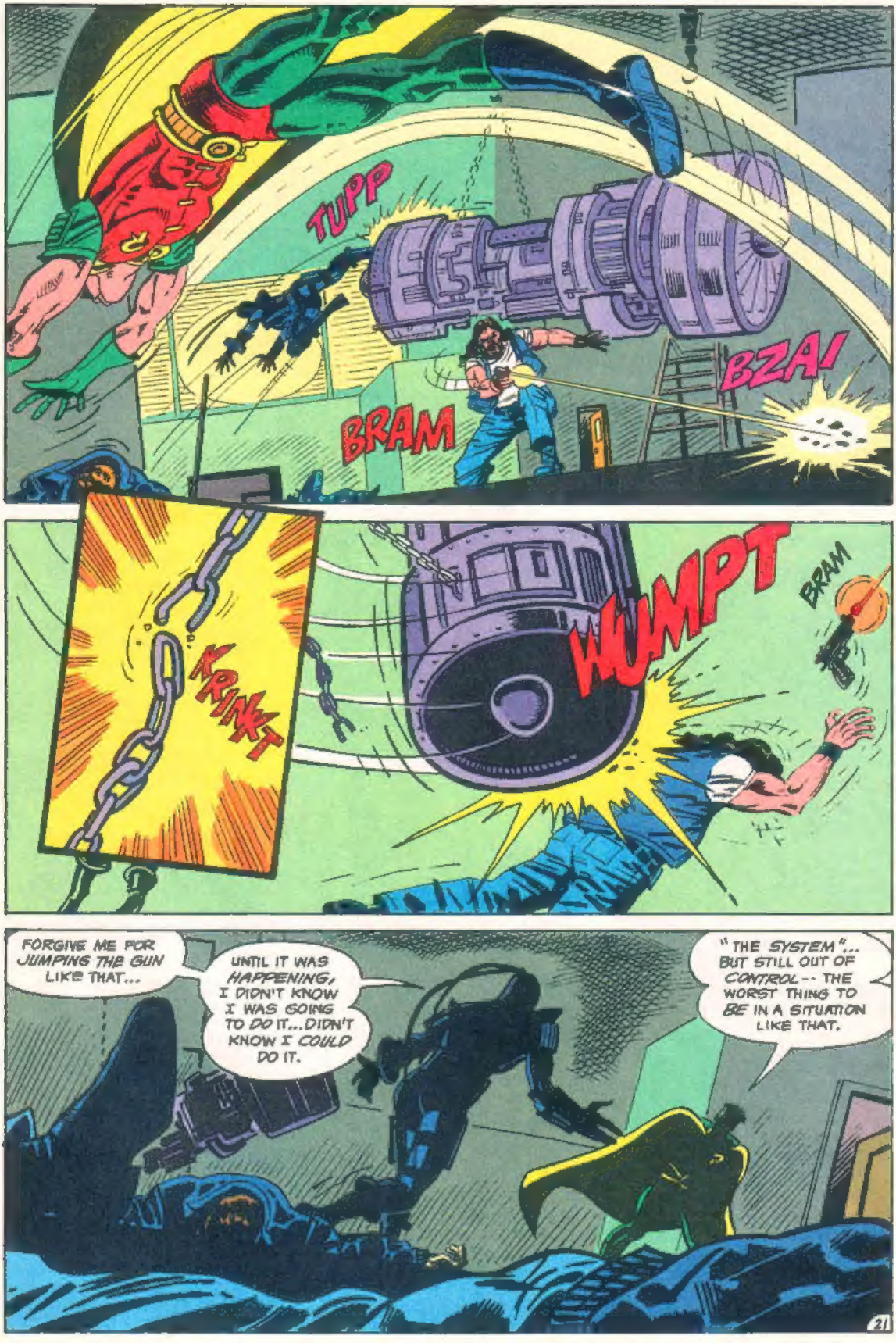

--JUST JUMP ON OUR HOGS AND DO IT TONIGHT--NOW--LIKE THE OLD DAYS!
YEAH--LET'S RIDE!
DO WHAT TONIGHT?
MY GUESS IS, SOMETHING SANTA WOULD FROWN ON--BUT WE'LL HAVE TO FOLLOW 'EM TO MAKE SURE...
"THE SKULLS HAVE GRADUATED FROM RAISING HELL FOR SHEER FUN TO DOING CRIME FOR SERIOUS PROFIT--
VROOOM
BRUM
BRUMMM
"--AND BATMAN SUSPECTS THEY'VE DETOURED FROM RUNNING DRUGS AND GUNS TO PEDDLING INDUSTRIAL SECRETS."
NO WAY TO KEEP UP, BUT WE CAN SEE 'EM FOR AT LEAST A MILE UP HERE.
AND WHAT HAPPENS IF THEY MAKE A TURN?
WE ASSUME THE WORST AND HEAD FOR--
"--YOUR NEW PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT."
YO, FRANK--IT'S ME--TONY--LEMME IN!
WAYNETECH DELIVERIES
BAMP BAMP
I FORGOT MY JACKET! MY WALLET'S IN IT!
16

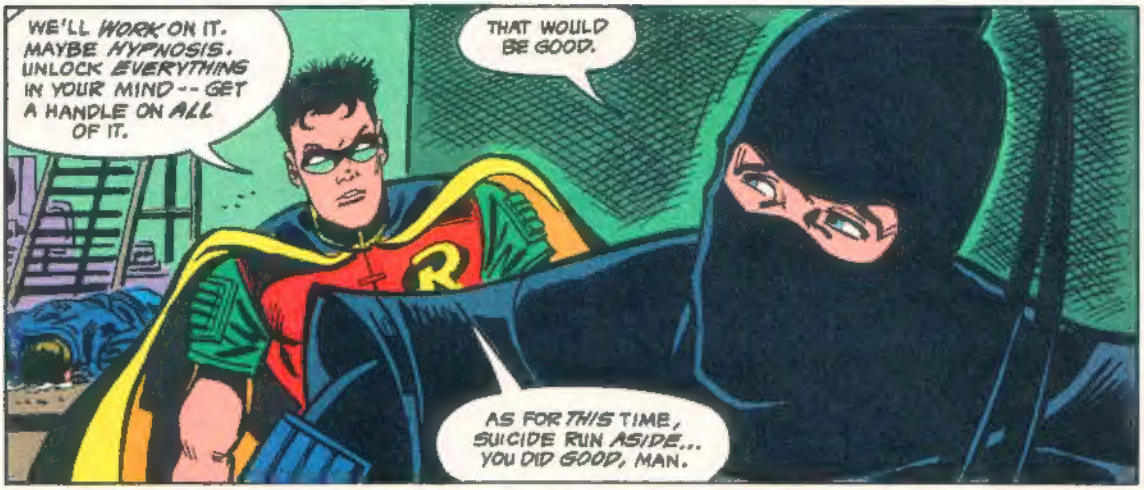
TECH
VERES
WHAZ!
WAKT
ALL RIGHT, TONY--MOVE! GET THOSE PLANS!
THEY'RE IN THE OFFICE--!
BINGO--PROVIDED YOU'RE READY FOR THE REAL THING, AZ.
NO WEAPONS WITH THIS OUTFIT.
IF I HAD MY SWORD...
YOU CAN HAVE WEAPONS--CERTAIN TYPES OF WEAPONS--BUT BEFORE WE EVEN DISCUSS IT, THERE'S ONE THING YOU'VE GOTTA KNOW...
BATMAN NEVER KILLS.
I KNOW.
LIFE IS SACRED TO HIM.
YES.
WAYNETECH DELIVERIES
IN HIS BOOK, LIFE EVEN BEATS OUT JUSTICE.
ALL RIGHT. NOW ABOUT THAT WEAPON...
HERE.
HEAVIER THAN IT LOOKS, BUT WHAT GOOD IS A LITTLE THING LIKE--
SNAP IT

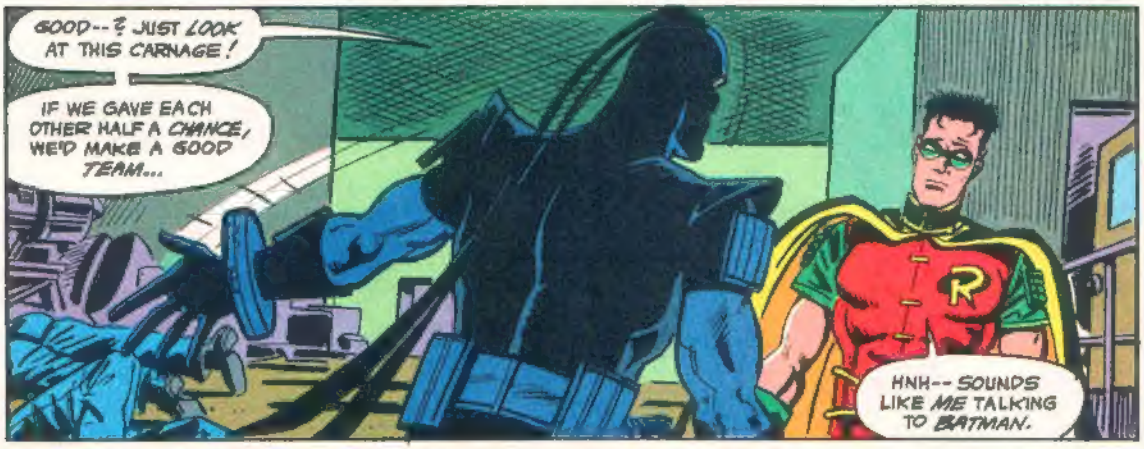
LIKE AN ASIAN STAFF? NOT BAD... BUT STILL, WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO? SMACK THE BULLETS?
SNIK
SNIK
NO. YOU DON'T CONFRONT BULLETS -- PERIOD.
UNTIL ALL GUNS ARE ELIMINATED, YOU DON'T EVEN MAKE A MOVE.
BUT HOW DO WE ELIM--
JUST CHILL OUT AND FOLLOW MY MOVE.
A SLINGSHOT?
WAYNETEC DELIVERIE
YO, A2-- I SAID CHILL... AND PICK THE LOCK FOR ME.
TONY! HUSTLE IT UP, MAN!
WE DON'T WANNA GET CAUGHT WITH OUR--
TAK!
FWEPT
OWW!!
WHAT THE--?
18

NO! THERE'S STILL ONE GUN!!
BRAM
BRAM
BRAM
HWUK
AND BATMAN SAYS I'M IMPETUOUS...
SWOKK
FRAKT
LOOK OUT! GET 'EM!!

WHAT'S GOIN' ON OUT--
UH OH.
CHUFF
GOOMPH!
ROKK
WUMP
THE P-PLANS...
CHWOK
KRUKK
SHUMP
SON OF A...
20


TUPP
BRAM
BZA!
KRINKT
WUMPT
BRAM
FORGIVE ME FOR JUMPING THE GUN LIKE THAT...
UNTIL IT WAS HAPPENING, I DIDN'T KNOW I WAS GOING TO DO IT... DIDN'T KNOW I COULD DO IT.
"THE SYSTEM"... BUT STILL OUT OF CONTROL -- THE WORST THING TO BE IN A SITUATION LIKE THAT.


WE'LL WORK ON IT. MAYBE HYPNOSIS. UNLOCK EVERYTHING IN YOUR MIND -- GET A HANDLE ON ALL OF IT.
THAT WOULD BE GOOD.
AS FOR THIS TIME, SUICIDE RUN ASIDE... YOU DID GOOD, MAN.



DR. SHONDRA KINSOLVING?
YES?
THIS IS BRUCE WAYNE-- I'VE BEEN REFERRED BY TIM DRAKE.
YES,..I'M TREATING TIMOTHY'S FATHER. WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?

I'D LIKE TO SCHEDULE A COMPLETE PHYSICAL EXAM, DR. KINSOLVING.
ROUTINE, MR. WAYNE -- OR ARE YOU EXPERIENCING ANY SPECIFIC SYMPTOMS?

NEXT ISSUE: KILLER CROC VS. THE MENACE OF BANE